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NURSING IN MISSION STATIONS



[This department has a twofold purpose—to keep nurses in this country in touch with the work of missionary nurses, and to put missionary nurses in touch with each other, for an interchange of ideas, questions, and suggestions. All nurses engaged in mission work, of every creed and country, are invited to contribute to its columns.]

THE UNTRAINED MIDWIFE IN INDIA

By E. A. FOSTER

Woman's Mission Hospital, Kolhapur, Bombay, West India

THE midwives in India are ignorant women, they have no education; they are a caste, so midwifery is handed down from the ages in the family, from grandmother to mother, and daughter. The midwives know nothing about cleanliness, they never wash their hands before examining the patient, which they do quite frequently during the time of labor, nor are they careful about having the patient's bowels moved. The result is anything but antiseptic, the patient's bowels moving at intervals during the stages of labor. The patient never has a bath before confinement, but a ceremonial bath is given her one hour after the child is born, whether she is strong or weak. The patient is always placed in a sitting position, supported in the arms of a woman sitting at the patient's back. Others are raised from the ground by a stone, or by some earth or ashes tied in a cloth, something like a cushion. The patient is always delivered during a pain, and on the floor, the floor being cleansed with cow manure.

If the placenta does not follow the child immediately, they are very anxious. Frequently I have been called when the placenta had not been delivered. Their way is to keep the patient in a sitting position, with her hair in her mouth; this position is supposed to contract the abdomen, and to help deliver the placenta. They also pull at the cord to deliver the placenta. I have seen cases where they had pulled at the cord till it had broken away altogether—and around the patient was a puddle of blood and water. They are reluctant to let the patient lie down after delivery; their idea is that a sitting position favors the discharge flowing freely. They think that a mass of clotted blood is always retained in the abdomen, and that it is necessary for it to be taken away. They tie a tight rope or a part of the patient's clothing, twisted like a rope, around the abdomen, above the uterus. They think the contracted uterus felt in the abdomen after child-birth is a mass of blood clots.

The native midwives use crude instruments. Women often come to the hospital for treatment who have been cut and badly torn with

these. They can seldom turn a child, and if an arm protrudes they cut it off. They often perforate the child's head if they cannot deliver it. Another of their ways is to open into the baby's chest, and they call that fate. Everything in India is fate. Another heathen way of theirs is that the patient is not allowed to have anything to eat or drink during labor, or till after the placenta is delivered. They protest against the patient having medicine, but ask to have it rubbed over the abdomen; their idea is that giving medicine internally defiles them and breaks their caste. As a child is always born during pain, one finds many cases of prolapse of the uterus, and rupture of the perineum, as a result. Post-partum hemorrhage often occurs, also puerperal fever, from infection. I have seen some sad cases from the carelessness of the untrained midwife.

But a new day is dawning for India when nurses, trained, are going out from the mission hospitals, to help their native sisters in their time of labor, and going out trained to be clean and to help the ignorant to take care of themselves and their children. Our nurses trained in the mission hospitals are Christian women, mostly young women from the Christian Girls' School. They also take a course in Bible study which fits them to be Bible-women as well as nurses, and in this way they have many opportunities to tell those whom they help about Jesus, the true Saviour and Lord. We can teach them and they can help, and India should be helped by her own Christian people, who may be home missionaries amongst their own people.

I am a graduate of the Presbyterian Hospital in Philadelphia, and I want to tell something of what the alumnae association of the training school for nurses of that hospital has done for India. They have a trained Bible woman, who is studying nursing. This woman gives the gospel every day in the dispensary. As the women come to have their bodies healed she gives the message to those who require healing for their souls. They are also supporting now one of the orphan girls, whom they have helped for eight years. She has entered on her three months' probation, and seems to prove herself a good nurse. In the future she will take up Bible-study and be prepared to help these poor women of this part of India in their suffering, and comfort them. They are helping to support other orphan children, who will some day tell others of the Saviour's love, and live for Christ in their homes. Much can be done to help the women in heathen lands, both spiritually and physically, by the trained nurse in the home-land. The nurse's life is hard on the mission field, but there is such a joy in helping the poor ignorant people, and in giving them a little love, and in knowing that there are others remembering and helping at home.